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# EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

## The contribution of indigenous people in Latin America

### ABSTRACT

*This article focuses on the triangle of intercultural learning – global learning and development education in which DDV International's work is situated. It outlines the development of intercultural bilingual education as well as the situation of the indigenous people in Latin America. Some of the indigenous languages are at risk of extinction and with them also the indigenous knowledge attached to it. Once they are lost, intercultural learning through these languages and cultures will not be possible anymore. Drawing on research and some results of the intercultural bilingual education the article highlights the role and importance of intercultural learning, and the potential for empowerment and transformation based on the dialogue between the indigenous and western cultures that occurs in development work.*

**Keywords:** *intercultural bilingual education, indigenous people, empowerment through intercultural education, indigenous knowledge*

### OPOLNOMOČENJE Z MEDKULTURNIM UČENJEM, PRISPEVEK STAROSELCEV IN STAROSELK V LATINSKI AMERIKI – POVZETEK

*Članek se osredotoča na stičišče medkulturnega učenja – globalnega učenja ter izobraževanja in ozaveščanja o razvoju, kjer svoje delo opravlja DDV International. Predstavljena sta razvoj medkulturnega dvojezičnega izobraževanja kot tudi položaj staroselcev v Latinski Ameriki. Nekaterim jezikom staroselcev grozi izumrtje, hkrati pa tudi izginotje znanja, ki ga ti prenašajo. Ko jih ne bo več, medkulturno učenje, ki ga omogočajo ti jeziki in kulture, ne bo več možno. Glede na rezultate raziskave in nekatere učinke medkulturnega dvojezičnega izobraževanja članek poudarja pomen medkulturnega učenja in potencial, ki ga prinaša opolnomočenje, ter transformacijo, ki temelji na dialogu med staroselskimi in zahodnimi kulturami ter se dogaja v procesu izobraževanja in ozaveščanja o razvoju.*

**Ključne besede:** *medkulturno dvojezično izobraževanje, staroselci, staroselke, opolnomočenje z medkulturnim izobraževanjem, znanje staroselcev in staroselk*

## INTRODUCTION

*Must* have, *can* have, *nice* to have... when this categorization used in development work is applied to the subject of intercultural (adult) education and/or learning (IL), we might observe an evolution in the IL field: coming from an attitude of the '*nice to have*' in the 1960ties through the more of a '*can have*' of the eighties, and into the '*must have*' of today's globalized world with increasing numbers of refugees and migrants in all societies. The issue at hand for me, therefore, is the 'Learning to live together' in pluri- and multi-cultural and – religious societies.

The following reflection on the intercultural adult education in development cooperation and in the context of working with indigenous people in Central America is based on the systematization of different projects that DVV International has implemented in the framework of its development cooperation in Latin America. Two of the longest term projects included building regional networks of organizations involved in the intercultural education with the aim of supporting systematization of experiences, while another was focused on developing a diploma course on *Mediación Pedagógica para la Interculturalidad* (Pedagogical Mediation for Interculturality). This course was piloted by a consortium of five organizations (CEAAL, CREFAL, CGEIB, UCIREN and DVV International) in Mexico and included around 200 adult educators between the years 2010 and 2015. The methodology is derived from action – reflection – action cycle, drawing on interrelated issues reflected in the sectors of intercultural learning, global learning and development education (see for example: World Future Council, 2014; Mayo, 2013; Schmelkes, 2011; UNESCO 2006) and applying them to different cases in the field.

Assuming the perspective of Latin America and its indigenous people it becomes obvious that the Maya have practiced intercultural learning long before the term was 'invented'. The Maya adapted Spanish Catholicism to their own worldview. Perhaps the most capturing example of the Maya's capacity to transform their model of the cosmos without destroying its basic structure is the adaptation of the Cross of Christ, the main symbol of European domination on this continent.

People are '*on the global move*' for a variety of reasons. On the one hand the seemingly *privileged people*, such as students, tourists, scientists, business people, etc., and on the other hand, those expelled by poverty, politics, wars and conflicts leading to forced migration and seeking refuge in different destination countries. The need all these people have in common are *intercultural competencies*. My contribution lies in reflecting on this need for intercultural awareness and competencies from the perspective of an organization deeply involved in development cooperation. My intention is to relate my reflections to some aspects of the current debates on intercultural learning, and to bring to you as a reader some hopefully interesting insights from DVV International's work in Latin America. There our institute works specifically with partner organizations supporting different indigenous groups.

## CONTEXTUALISATION – WORKING IN THE TRIANGLE OF INTERCULTURAL LEARNING, DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND GLOBAL LEARNING

For DVV International it is obvious *that intercultural learning, global learning and development education* are closely interrelated and form the triangle in which its work takes place. Taking all three types of approaches into consideration, the triangle corresponds with the mission of DVV International, which is to contribute to poverty alleviation through provision of youth and adult education or lifelong learning respectively as a human right. Set up in Germany in the year 1969, DVV International, with regard to the then existing academic debate revolving around the development cooperation and development education, was one of the first organizations in Germany that were conscious of the necessity to combine its development cooperation work in the then so called Third World countries with a concept of ‘global learning’ (GlobalesLernen) directed - in form of a project and running since 1979 (then: Volkshochschulen and the Subject of Africa, Asia and Latin America”) - towards the 1,000 adult education centers in Germany. A department was created inside the DVV International in order to develop formats, didactic materials and publications to support the German VHS adult education system, with the goal of offering a better understanding of how poverty in the South is related to consumption and production patterns in the North to the German public. There has been and there still exists a more traditional view that *intercultural learning and education* is primarily concerned with more individual issues by focusing on the awareness of cultural differences, while *global learning* is supposedly focalized through a more social or sociological analysis (Seitz, 1996, pp. 20). But according to the experience of DVV International such view does not provide the full details of the aims of intercultural learning in the world society we are in today, and reduces global learning to a rather academic exercise, if it does not include experiences generated in the field of IL. In the article published by Dürste, Fenner and Hinzen in the magazine *Adult Education and Development* (2004) the examination of this relationship concludes with the following essential point: both global and intercultural learning are never solely a matter of the individual acquisition of skills but should always include the knowledge on how to act in response to societal change in the developing world society. Hence, all intercultural learning processes initiated locally contribute to development education, the starting point of which is the global responsibility of the individual in the local context: “*Global learning is thus impossible if it fails to take account of its intercultural implications, and intercultural learning would be reduced to discussing the peculiarities of folklore if it paid no heed to the political, social and individual consequences of globalization. It is actually one of the important tasks of Adult Education to prevent this and to link intercultural education with global learning*” (Dürste, Fenner and Hinzen, 2004, pp. 105).

According to Bourn (2015), the evolution of development education was fraught between debates on whether development education is about informing the public in the global North or about changing ideas about development both in the global North and South. His analysis shows an increase in popularity in the 2000’s and identifies four principles that are required to reach a new pedagogical framework. They are: a global outlook;

recognition of power and inequality in the world; belief in social justice and equity, and a commitment to reflection, dialogue and transformation.

It would appear that the differentiation and ‘scientification’ of the three concepts and academic strands that are so closely interrelated with each other lends itself to academic development interest. All three have their own history, magazines and publications, and face their own challenges of further future theoretical development in order to be of relevance for the practice of transformative adult education. At the same time new concepts, triggered by challenges on a global scale – especially the current education for sustainable development paradigm –, have sprung up, together with the increased demand for global citizenship education. The application to the practice of pedagogy or andragogy thus remains complex, conflictive and challenging. And for all, the key question remains whether EDUCATION or critical education can really bring about the behavioral changes required for transition to societies looking for the good living (*buenvivir*) and not solely dominated by the market approach prevalent today.

### **INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND TRANSITION FROM THE ‘WORLD WE LIVE IN’ TO THE ‘WORLD WE WANT’?**

Let us check in with our own ‘paradigms’ of how we see *development* as Europeans before we move on deeper into intercultural learning. Allow me to put it in form of some questions: is it not so that for those not involved that much in ethno - or anthropological research in a region quite far away but heavily influenced by the European history with its original attitude of conquering and colonializing other countries and peoples, we are even today still inclined to have stereotypes in our European brains? What do we really know and what do we think about indigenous communities in Latin America? Do we really see the “*other*”, as observed by Whitaker and Fiamengue (2002, pp. 20), who would be represented by “*all the traditional populations (peasants, indigenous Indians and forest people, etc.) exploited by the economic system, with its perverse articulation*”. Some of us might actually have taken notice of the rising of the Zapatistas in 1994 in Southern Mexico, defending their rights to live on the land of their ancestors and determine their educational needs themselves. The Zapatistas today are a good example of how alternatives can be lived, but also how making mistakes and learning from them are a necessary part of the difficult process of creating autonomy and living alternatives in a macroeconomic system of global market domination. In Latin America there is a strong movement of resistance on the part of indigenous people who are often trying to keep a balance in relation to the environment, resisting the advances of the neo-liberal economic system and defending their culture and traditionalism when dealing with the ecosystem. In doing this, they are often ‘accused’ of being “*primitive, wild*” and “*reactionary*” or even “*terrorists*”. On the other hand, when those populations surrender to the pressures and begin to act according to the rules of the market, they are accused by environmentalists of being non-traditional and destroyers of their own environment.

In the wake of debates towards the upcoming international Post-2015 Agenda on the follow up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the issue of *sustainable development* is also coming into the mainstream focus of other disciplines besides the educational one. The whole implementation process will obviously become a really big challenge for adult education and intercultural learning. We are bound to see more conceptual and political conflicts arising around the conflicting interests of development strategists, environmentalists and other social agents. Some are already ongoing in different countries in Latin America, specifically those with rich biodiversity such as Ecuador and Brazil. These interests relating to the Amazon region are, in addition to being conflicting, quite ambiguous, since the social agents are as dissimilar as the intentions that bring them together or drive them apart.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that a *new paradigm of development* is taking shape, questioning the type of traditional Western *developmentalism* which is now – by many agents – seen to be too destructive to be sustainable in the future. In Latin America, starting from what in Ecuador and Bolivia has already been enshrined into the constitutions as the *new development concept* of ‘*buenvivir*’, we can see the beginning even of a new global social movement questioning the goal of economic growth without considering the issue of planetary boundaries (Rockström, Sachs, Öhman and Schmidt-Traub, 2013). Could this go hand in hand with a recently (2010) initiated National Happiness Index as a serious complementary index to the better known GDP of the World Bank. Why not learn interculturally from Bhutan, the one and only country in the world, where happiness is enshrined in the constitution and not just ANY Happiness but a holistic one: “*Setting an alternative framework of development: Bhutan’s GNH vision of domains of GNH, taken together, reflect the purpose of development. If certain dimensions contract, or are being crowded out by material progress, the GNH Index must explicitly convey such information as the imbalances enter, in order to catalyze public deliberation and if relevant, action.*” (A short guide to the Gross National Happiness Index of Bhutan, 2012).

## ABOUT DIFFERENT CONCEPTS OF KNOWLEDGE?

If we assume the attitude of intercultural learning, it is also recommendable to raise our awareness regarding the existence of different definitions of ‘knowledge’, knowledge systems and therefore ‘learning’. Knowledge, in simple terms, can be defined as the awareness or understanding of a practical or theoretical thing or fact.

When we reflect on intercultural learning in its true sense, we go beyond the exotic and folkloristic notion of multiculturalism, summarized well by Quraishy (2008) as follows: “*IL is not eating doner kebabs, learning belly dancing or listening to rap music. To me, diversity, whether it is cultural, ethnic or religious, means celebrating and enjoying difference as well as similarities. We should practise it, because we live in a globalized world. Internet, email and fast travel have opened borders, which cannot be closed any*

*more. Celebrating diversity does not mean that we force others to accept the way we do things. It can be only achieved by good example, cooperation and respect”.*

We can turn to the experiences of the intercultural universities in Latin America for a good example of how to enter into the process of creating spaces and programmes for truthful and ingenious intercultural interactions, ones that can result in a much more intricate, involved, innovative and transformational educational model where individuals, bearers of ideas, concepts and methods stemming from diverse and opposing paradigms or cultural orientations, can converge to combine, exchange, transfer, construct and hybridize their respective knowledge.

In the nineties, indigenous intercultural universities were created in different countries in Latin America with the aim to decolonize knowledge. According to Mato and Maldonado (2007), they have been conceived as intercultural institutions designed to train indigenous community leaders capable of hybridizing or carrying out a “dialogue of knowledge” and research methods of what are ultimately two different, and often times, opposing and contentious paradigms – one stemming from conventional Western universities and referred to as modern (global), and the other originating from indigenous people, also better known as traditional (local).

In Latin America the concept of interculturality seems to have become (and it is important to really see this as a difference from developments in Europe) a key concept in the struggle for the new relationship between dominant and subordinated knowledge and even identities. We must not forget that even the concept of dialogue has a political dimension and that education in many cases serves to stabilize a system which in the case of Latin America has not accepted indigenous people as equal actors. Therefore, ‘indigenous’ knowledge has also been used in a derogatory manner. In the Western academic paradigm it has been and still often is characterized as primitive and wild. In the sector of development work there is a growing recognition and attention of the need to safeguard this type of knowledge, but because it contrasts with the knowledge created by research institutions, private companies or development organizations, it is not easily accepted as being relevant. Already in 1977 the World Bank identified the importance of indigenous knowledge: in the “*emerging global knowledge economy a country’s ability to build and mobilize knowledge capital, is equally essential for sustainable development as the availability of physical and financial capital. The basic component of any country’s knowledge system is its indigenous knowledge. It encompasses the skills, experiences and insights of people, applied to maintain or improve their livelihood.*” (The World Bank, 1977).

At this stage the possibility that is offered by the progress of communication technologies is of great importance as indigenous peoples have become active in the Web environment, the latter enabling them to connect with each other and present and share information. Efforts are underway to create networks of indigenous researchers in order to exert influence and develop courses for learning about indigenous knowledge and creating a different concept of analysis.



In conclusion: Today the societies and knowledge ARE all pluricultural, therefore education and learning MUST be intentionally INTERCULTURAL, meaning that differences and similarities are brought into contact and are reflected upon through interaction and dialogue on a face to face level.

## **THE SITUATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRIES OF DVV ACTIVITY**

In the second part of the article, I would like to present the experiences and reflections from some of the project work of DVV International in Central America. DVV supports the development of adult education structures in Mexico, Guatemala and Cuba.

Before we proceed to the details of Intercultural Learning and Education in this ‘other’ part of the world, it is important to be aware of the macroeconomic conditions of the continent, even if the specific work is done on a local level.

For about 300 years from the year of the arrival of the Spanish conquerors in 1492 to the first wars of independence, Latin America was deeply influenced by a very colonial mode of social organization resulting in the subjugation of large parts of society (Indians, African slaves). Export-based agrarian capitalism furthermore aggravated this situation as white elite, supported by state institutions, appropriated the land of the indigenous people.

According to the statistics generated by recent studies from the different United Nations Organizations such as the Economic Commission for Latin America (Economic Survey of Latin America..., 2015) and The World Bank (2015) there has been quite a high rate of economic growth during the last 10 years before the global financial crisis hit these countries badly. But amongst the indigenous population, poverty has increased and not diminished, thus confirming that poverty is rather inherent in the social and economic structure of the region. This structure is both the effect and cause of asymmetrical power relations between urban and rural areas, between indigenous peoples and mestizo subcultures, between men and women, and, between the North and the South.

Looking at the concrete situation with 30 to 50 million indigenous inhabitants, over 650 indigenous peoples and more than 550 different languages spoken in 21 countries, Latin America is one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse areas of the world. In most of the geographical and cultural areas, which configure the region’s cultural linguistic and biological diversity, biological and linguistic extinctions go hand in hand, and similarly to the endangered biological species, there are also, by estimations, at least 111 of the remaining 557 living languages on the verge of extinction (UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger).

Luckily, a notable and continent-wide indigenous movement has been active since the 1970ties, constituting one of the most dynamic and innovative social movements of recent decades. As a result more than 10 Latin American countries finally introduced laws

acknowledging the existing linguistic and cultural diversity. In Guatemala, for example, twin government-indigenous commissions have been set up to look at the formation of government projects. These include state reforms, educational reforms and discussions on indigenous autonomy. With the return of democracy in 1990ties a debate began on the need for a law for the indigenous people, and ideas regarding an alternative education for the indigenous peoples started to emerge.

The indigenous inhabitants of Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru, Mexico and Ecuador represent more than 80% of the total indigenous population of the region. These five countries have a long history of bilingual education, but the needs of all indigenous children and adolescents are far from being met. The Mayas living in Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras are the second most populated single indigenous people, with 6 to 7 million members.

Most indigenous communities are now bilingual, with indigenous monolingualism being exceptional: only 9.8% in Mexico, 12.4% in Bolivia, and 14.3% in Ecuador. The exception to this rule might be Guatemala, where indigenous monolingualism is much higher and reaches 43.6% of the Maya population (Verdugo and Raymundo, 2009). In general, monolingualism persists as a trait of women and children under school age. It is also interesting to note that there are new developments of claiming an indigenous identity and increasing demand for the right to education and indigenous languages that is very relevant to education policies.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION (IBE) IN LATIN AMERICA**

Bilingual education of some kind currently exists in 17 countries in Latin America; intercultural bilingual education, bilingual intercultural education, or ethno-education: Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, French Guiana, Surinam, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Argentina. In some countries, such as Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, and soon in Guatemala bilingual education embraces all students of native languages. In Paraguay, in recognition of the country's predominantly bilingual character, bilingual education has national reach on all levels, and in all modalities, of the education system. In Mexico and Ecuador, IBE is a kind of subsystem running parallel to the one aimed at the Spanish-speaking majority.

If the issue is approached from a more critical point of view, it can be said that although there is a history of intercultural bilingual education in almost every country it is important to keep in mind that there are differences between governmental IBE models and strategies, and those implemented by NGOs and/or indigenous organizations. Government models generally focus on the technicalities of IBE and of school bilingualism, while grass-roots' emphasis is placed on the cultural and political aims of education, thus considerably expanding the underlying notion of educational quality. Comparing the different models, it can be said that the countries where IBE policy has been mainly



government or academia driven are Guatemala, Mexico and Peru, IBE emerged of indigenous political demand and community involvement in Bolivia and Ecuador and the only truly bilingual country in the region is Paraguay. Also critics point out that little or nothing has been done to move beyond the educational sphere or the radio, to incorporate the indigenous languages into other walks of life, where they would be in permanent interaction with the dominant languages and thus would enable an intercultural learning based on the participation of indigenous people in the social, political and economic life of their country, while making use of their ancestral languages in both written and oral form.

Historically, the story line of IBE is very complex and it is not possible to go into detail in the framework of this article. It is a story of a constant struggle to create and establish an educational system on all levels (formal and non-formal) that is truly intercultural. In its efforts, the system has come a long way from the very violent and well documented hispanization strategy (López and Küper, 2000), through the compensatory strategy (the so called subtractive bilingualism), to the current situation in which legal resolutions exist that formally recognize linguistic and cultural rights of indigenous people. Not only has this process been backed by progress of democratization, but also by one of ethnic rediscovery, reaffirmation and resistance to ethnocide, as well as a growing international attention resulting in, for example, the International Labour Organization Convention, also known as *ILO-convention 169* favoring the indigenous peoples and encouraging their integration. Also notable are the United Nations Decade of Indigenous Peoples, the Project on the Universal Declaration of Indigenous Rights, and the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights of Barcelona in 1996. Various ministerial conferences of education and/or conferences of Latin American presidents were concerned with the right of all children to receive education in their own mother tongue.

Although IBE has come a long way to achieve the current contribution to the progress of a holistic concept of interculturality in the Latin American context, new challenges appear, amongst them the need to adjust to the demands of the market and at the same time transform the rigidity of different knowledge, disciplines and professions to open the door to multidisciplinary, flexible and associative competencies. Another challenge is the changing situation created through the rural-urban migration. Although IBE was originally developed in a rural environment, it now has to find new concepts for students speaking two languages simultaneously. Indigenous children now also speak variations of Spanish or Portuguese and in some places there are attempts to teach the lost indigenous language using second language methodology. As the indigenous knowledge systems and also languages in Latin America come at risk of becoming extinct, IBE is also faced with the issue of being part of the ongoing *rescue* issue. In Guatemala, for example, in certain towns and cities the so-called Fringe of Mayan Language and Culture Programme has been organized with the aim of making first grade, primary school children aware of the Mayan culture. Students have the chance to learn the rudiments of the Mayan tongue through poems, songs and diverse games and activities, so that they develop an openness and understanding towards the country's indigenous population.

IBE itself can be said to follow a process of evolution; *multicultural education*, *intercultural bilingual education*, *indigenous education*, or *intercultural education* are terms that seem to be used interchangeably. Lopez (2009) highlights the fact that, although the term has been appropriated correctly by indigenous leaders to advocate policy and design programmes, the reality is that intercultural relationships in Latin America have historically been tainted by conflict and not by mutual appreciation or respect for diversity and equity.

Nevertheless, from studying different education projects that focus on interculturality and intercultural universities in Latin America, it can at least be acknowledged that these institutions do offer innovative responses to some important challenges faced by contemporary higher education both around the world and in the region, such as those in teaching and learning innovations and the solution of peoples problems (Mato, 2008, pp. 11).

One of these institutions is the Peasant and Indigenous University Network UCI-Red in Mexico, which supports and promotes endogenous and sustainable development processes in different micro-regions of the Peninsula of Yucatan, Mexico. This is a collective project where Mexican Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) have become engaged and allied with Yucatec Mayan peasants. "Interculturality" has become one of the main principles of their definition of sustainable development and it has been assimilated into their practice of development promotion. UCI-Red is an example of realizing that indigenous knowledge is a concept that involves not only ideas and principles but most importantly embodied forms of knowing, social and symbolic practices, and a particular ideal of personhood. With a diploma course in interculturality, this is an example of how learning spaces must be constructed as a hybrid form if they want to contribute to a true dialogue.

## THE MEXICAN CASE

Known for its institutional efforts to build a national identity through the customarily cultural homogenization of its citizenry, Mexico modified its constitution in 1992, defining the country as a multicultural and plurilingual nation. In 2001 this extraordinary event led to the creation of the Ministry of Education's General Coordination for Intercultural and Bilingual Education, a government agency conceived to contribute to building a more equitable and just society by improving and broadening the educational opportunities of indigenous people and by promoting more equal and mutually respectful relations between groups of different cultures. In 2003, Mexico created its first indigenous intercultural university. By 2008, ten intercultural universities were operating serving 7,000 students with an unexpected higher percent of female students. Their aim was to include "*the worldviews, languages, ways of knowing, knowledge production methods, value systems, needs and demands of indigenous and people of African descent*" (Schmelkes, 2009, pp. 2).

DVV International started working with different organizations in Mexico in 1992. The development cooperation instrument that has been employed is called "Support to the

Social Structure” in the developing countries, it is financed by the German Ministry for Development Cooperation (BMZ). Project partners are various non-governmental organizations working with indigenous communities in order to identify problems and examine the ways of developing realistic projects to resolve the problems of these communities. They take responsibility for the requisite education and training programmes in the context of the planned project activities. The total population in the states where the DVV International’s partners are working is around 3 million in total.

## THE EDUCATIONAL AIM OF DVV’S PROJECTS

Taking into regard the still effective ‘hispanization’ attitude towards the indigenous cultures, which resulted in a pedagogy that creates oppression, one of the most important goals for the DVV’s work was *“initially to liberate the blocked human potential for creativity, and to trust to people’s own judgment and ability to deal consciously with problems. The intention was to strengthen feelings of individual and collective responsibility, within the cultural context. The economic aspect was not overlooked, participatory “diagnoses” being carried out in parallel to record the available resources that might be developed into feasible economic projects”* (Klesing Rempel, 2002).

Klesing-Rempel (2002) reflects on the difficult starting situation, with the partner organizations being seen to ‘exaggerate’ the use of such idealistic concepts as identity, autonomy, culture and tradition in education. With such attitude the conflicts are avoided, creative potential is restricted and NO intercultural learning takes place. If indigenous knowledge is idealized, it will not really give indigenous communities opportunities to learn and evolve. Therefore, projects were designed with an intercultural dimension in mind, and through a difficult consultation process with the partner organizations. The projects sought a combination of practical skills with educational provision based on different forms of communication, action, having an awareness of different types of knowledge systems, finding ways of communication between mestizos and indigenous people, intending to foster the intercultural dialogue and democratization to build a multicultural society. With this intercultural ‘attitude’ on the side of DVV, seminars and trainings were organized on interculturalism and the intercultural education of children and communities. The participation of indigenous people themselves enabled a political debate on themes such as autonomy and human rights. The events were organized on local, regional and national level, and were key issues that DVV International applied to its project work.

Another important aim for DVV International was to promote the participation of more women in the project activities, as they were sometimes found to be highly underrepresented due to their monolingualism, but more often also due to the cultural habits. So the inclusion of women and the opening of spaces for them in order to become more active was seen as the enrichment of the culture and a contribution to village development.

## LESSONS LEARNT

The indigenous setting has offered DVV International a chance to learn that development through education starts by joint effort with the partners and target groups in finding ways to create these spaces and activities that ultimately lead to a more sustainable development.

Based on these fundamental lessons, DVV International created an intercultural education consortium together with CREFAL (Centro de Cooperación Regional para la Educación de Adultos en América Latina y el Caribe), CEAAL (Consejo de Educación de Adultos de América Latina), and AYUDA en ACCION (Spanish non-governmental organization). The consortium has implemented seminars and conferences with the aim of providing adult teachers with methodological guidance regarding intercultural learning. Teaching texts on interculturalism were also developed.

Without going into the details of the pedagogy of empowerment, pedagogy for the oppressed or transformative pedagogy, I nevertheless believe that in the context of interculturality in the Latin American context we need to note the work of Paulo Freire. His call for hope and dreams as essential elements for humanity is still very much relevant today.

## CONCLUSION

When we look at the world and its problems, we can humbly learn what the benefits of intercultural learning are. We have not managed to solve the contradictions of the current challenges through the development model based on scientifically generated knowledge, but have on the contrary even contributed to the environmental, cultural and biological destruction. Thus we conclude with the humble hope that intercultural learning, understood as an equal dialogue between agents from diverse backgrounds, can contribute to the debate on the World we want to live in. We can even go back in history to Martin Buber, a great German-Jewish philosopher and learn from him some of his fundamental ideas regarding intercultural dialogue. His focus is on 'the reality of "space" that exists between individuals. At its root lies the idea that self-perfection is achievable only within relationship with others. Relationship exists in the form of dialogue. Furthermore, self-knowledge is possible only 'if the relation between man and creation is understood to be a dialogical relationship' (Buber in Avnon, (1998), pp. 2). Significantly, for Buber the dialogue involves all kinds of relation: to self, to other(s) and to all forms of created being. Buber defines three kinds of dialogue. There is the genuine dialogue – either spoken or silent – where each of the participants truly perceives the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between them and him- or herself. There is the technical dialogue, which is prompted solely by the need of objective understanding. And there is the monologue disguised as a dialogue, in which two or more individuals, meeting in space, speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine they have escaped the

torment of being thrown back on their own resources (Buber, 1958). Technical dialogue is driven by the need to understand something and need not engage the soul. Monologue, a distorted form of dialogue, is what happens most of the time. Words are said, but there is little or no connection. The meeting involved in genuine dialogue is rare, and is, in the real sense, a meeting of souls. ('The primary word *I-Thou* can be spoken only with the whole being', Buber (1958, pp. 24)). The life of dialogue involves 'the turning towards the other' (Buber, 1958). It is not found by seeking, but by grace. In a very real sense, we are being called to the genuine dialogue, rather than actively searching for it.

If intercultural education represents the most appropriate response to today's increasingly globalized and interconnected world, where different languages, religions, cultural behaviors and ways of thinking and knowing increasingly converge, it is in this conversion, or hybridization, or intercultural dialogue, where the challenges of educational researchers lay ahead. Once the debate on the intercultural education completes its evolutionary cycle from its formative years to maturity, it will have made significant contributions to another perspective that is important: How to create an andragogy of sustainable development.

YES, intercultural education is a MUST HAVE because only as such it will lead to some kind of transformation of the self, of the curriculum and finally of the society. Further efforts must be made to create more inclusive societies and appreciate the contributions made by minority groups, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees and many other excluded groups. Adult education has already created and MUST continue to create many more tools to make this a successful endeavor.

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